

Not in Kansas Anymore
Nick, 8B

“F-3 class one mile and closing, due east...” said Kathy’s voice on the satellite phone, piercing the eerie silence.

“Copy that,” said Nick. He glanced at the map of Kansas and Tornado Alley on his clipboard and circled their location and wrote “TI”, which stood for “tornado impact.”

“Lightning approaching your position. Get grounded,” Kathy warned.

Nick turned to his colleague Bill, who was at the wheel of the TIV (tornado interception vehicle) that belonged to the BKN Tornado, Inc., one of the country’s top storm-chasing companies.

All of a sudden it started to hail.

Breaking the silence, Bill said, “I don’t see anything. Do you?”

“No,” Nick replied. “I’m going to deploy a probe and collect a hail sample.”

Nick donned his linebacker’s padding and helmet, opened the door of the TIV and raced around the armored Jeep following them to grab a meteorological probe and the spikes that would keep it in the ground once the tornado got near it. Nick moved fluently and quickly as if acting from the muscle memory from his 10-year storm-chasing career.

All of a sudden, Bill started shouting through the walkie-talkies, “get back to the TIV immediately!” He could see the tornado and it was heading directly for their position!

Nick raced back to the TIV, grabbing the biggest chunk of hail that he could find on his way. Once inside, Bill locked the armored vehicle down so that nothing could get in or out. Then he hit the big red button that lowered the vehicle hydraulically so that wind couldn’t get under the TIV and pick it up.

At the same time, Nick popped the hail into the deep-freezer for later analysis.

Nick looked out the 5-inch thick widow at the approaching tornado, which was now just a few hundred yards away, and moving fast, and yelled at Bill, “Brace for impact!”

All of a sudden the sat phone cracked to life saying, “Two hundred meters and closing... One hundred meters... Brace for impact! Ninety... eighty...” and all of a sudden the phone went dead, to be replaced by a tremendous creaking sound of the steel armor plating under extreme stress.

Nick could feel the TIV tipping, but didn’t believe it was really happening.

Suddenly the world spun and he felt the impact of the roof on the road... and he blacked out.

When Nick opened his eyes, he was laying in the middle of a rainbow-colored brick road. Thickly lining both sides of the road were pink trees for as far as he could see. Bill sat up too and said, “Hey Nick, I don’t think we’re in Kansas anymore.”

All of a sudden, flying red dogs appeared out of nowhere and started divebombing towards them. To escape, Bill and Nick ran into the middle of the trees. They sat down and started to think about what they were going to do to get home. Suddenly, something tapped Bill on the back. He turned around to find a tree – the only green tree in this strange pink forest.

“Welcome to the Land of Foz,” said a very thin bear, who stepped out from behind the tree.

“Where are we?” Bill and Nick asked simultaneously.

“Why, you’re in the Land of Foz,” the tree answered. “Why do you ask? And who are you?”

Nick and Bill looked at each other in disbelief, and then at the tree, and the bear, and back at each other. “What the heck is the Land of Foz?” Nick thought. “And how do we get back to Kansas?”

Bill spoke up. “We’re storm chasers from Kansas, and we want to know how to get home.”

“Kansas? We’ve heard of Kansas,” the bear said. “There was a girl from there here about 50 years ago. Her name was Dorothy. Do you know her?”

“Yes,” Bill said. “That’s my mother’s name.”

“Interesting,” said the bear. “The only way out of here is to meet The Great Tornado of Bemeros Toald.”

“Where is he?” Bill asked.

“He’s in Bemeros Toald,” the tree said bluntly. “Everyone knows that!”

“How do we get there?” Nick asked.

“Follow the rainbow brick road,” the tree said.

Nick thanked them and he and Bill started to walk down the road.

All of a sudden, they emerged from the forest of pink trees and found themselves in a prairie of cell phone plants. As far as they could see, there were cornstalk-sized plants with broad leaves and instead of ears of corns there were phones. Lots of phones. That’s when they noticed a small sign by the side of the road that read “Welcome to iPrairie.”

As they walked by an especially ugly plant with phones that resembled an iPhone, it began to ring. So Nick picked it and answered it. But all he heard was the beating of wings...

Out of nowhere, the flying red dogs started attacking them again, so Nick and Bill began running as fast as they could.

As they came to the top of a hill, they saw a city that was an exact replica of Boston but was all emerald green. As they ran towards the city, they could see it had been overrun by the flying dogs. There were hundreds of the dogs in the streets listening to a speech by Chairman Woof, who was standing on a balcony of a building that was 60 stories tall and all glass. As Chairman Woof barked out his speech, Nick and Bill turned to run out of the city, but instead they ran into a branch that appeared out of nowhere, sticking out into the road in front of them.

When Nick woke up again, he was laying half in and half out of the overturned and crushed TIV. He was surrounded by tree branches and the remains of a pink road sign.

“Bill. Are you awake?” he said.

“Yeah,” Bill answered weakly. “Why?”

“I had the strangest dream,” Nick said.

“Me too.”